

Safety Handbook



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF GREATER
NORTHWEST INDIANA

Oct. 3, 2023



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Introduction

Safety has always been the bedrock of the Boys & Girls Club organization. From secure daily operations to the way we respond to emergencies, the safety of our members has always been our number one priority. While the goal should always be to eliminate or avoid emergency situations, some (like natural disasters) are unpreventable. With written plans and a proper implementation/training schedule, however, impact can be minimized and a “return to normal” can be expedited.

Our Boys & Girls Clubs are a vital part of the communities we serve and offering a place where young people feel safe is a significant component of a high-quality Club experience. It is our consistent delivery of this standard that drives stronger outcomes for our youth in our three priority areas – Academic Success, Good Character and Citizenship, and Healthy Lifestyles. None of our goals in any of these areas can be achieved if we do not provide safe environments for our members. That is why it is critical to maintain the safety of our members as our number one priority.

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Mission Statement

The Mission of Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Northwest Indiana (BGCGNWI) is to inspire and enable the youth of our communities to realize their full potential as productive, responsible and caring citizens.

Vision Statement

It is our Vision to be the best youth development organization in our communities perpetually committed to a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Values

BGCGNWI has identified six values that it feels are paramount to our success:

Accountability – Holding ourselves to the highest standards.

Empathy – Understanding the perspectives and feelings of others.

Fun – Finding enjoyment in what you are doing.

Opportunity – Possibilities to achieve something greater.

Teamwork – Working together to make the Club a positive and safe environment.

Trust – Belief in ourselves, our organization and our youth.

Safety and Facilities Committee

The organization has a Safety and Facilities Committee that meets regularly to review incidents, discuss policy, and inspect facilities. This committee is led by a Board member and comprised of community members with a background in safety management.

Emergency Operations Plan

The organization has a written Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) that is reviewed by our Safety and Facilities Committee annually and subsequently approved by our Board of Directors. Elements of this plan are used to train Staff upon hire, and annually thereafter. We have taken the elements most critical for our parents to understand and made them a part of this Handbook. Other topics were taken from our Operations Manual, which is a “how-to” guide for Staff entrusted with the safety of our members.

24-hour Toll-free Child Safety Hotline

We encourage all staff, members and families to report any incident or situation they feel is unsafe. Through our national organization’s partnership with Praesidium, one of the nation’s leading safety experts, BGCGNWI members and staff have access to a confidential 24-hour toll-free Child Safety Hotline at 866-607-SAFE (7233) or SafeClub@Praesidiuminc.com.

Crisis Management Team

A Crisis Management Team has been identified and approved by our Board of Directors. This team consists of key administrative Staff and volunteers who are prepared to assist with a crisis at a moment’s notice. A Crisis Hotline has been established to give Staff immediate access to the Crisis Management Team.

Safe Passage Policy

For members under the age of 12, a parent, guardian or other pre-authorized adult must pick up each member from the Club. Members age 12 and older may leave the Club unescorted with written permission from a parent/guardian. Members 12 and older may also escort other members of their household from the Club. No member, regardless of age, will be allowed to return to the Club once they leave the premises for the day.

The Club will not physically restrain a member that insists on leaving the Club, nor block the facility’s exits. Therefore, it is each parent’s responsibility to discuss the Club’s Safe Passage Policy with his or her child and ensure he or she complies.

Our Clubs will not accept responsibility for members who leave unsupervised and in breach of this policy. The Club does, however, reserve the right to discipline members who leave unescorted without written permission, up to and including suspension and/or termination of membership.

Rules for Members

Rules and guidelines for member behavior are critical to the safety of everyone at the Club. Parents should discuss these rules with their child(ren) as necessary to ensure they understand the expectations. Each Club may post and enforce additional rules at its discretion.

- Members and guests need to scan their card or sign in at the front desk when entering and leaving the Club.
- All members (and parents/guardians) must adhere to the Safe Passage Policy.
- If you did not attend school on any given day, you are not allowed to attend the Club.
- All members and Staff are to treat each other and all property with respect and courtesy.
- Appropriate language must be used at all times.
- Maintain your personal space by keeping hands, feet, etc. to yourself.
- Any behavior that might be described as “bullying” will not be tolerated.
- Running is only allowed in the gym.
- Mobile devices are NOT to be taken into restrooms. Other rules regarding the use of personal mobile devices differ by Club. Please ask at your Club for its stance on this issue.
- Use the main entrance only. No one is allowed to open a different exterior door unless instructed to do so by Staff in an emergency.
- Food and drinks are to be kept in the lounge or designated area only.
- Vending machines need to be used carefully. Refunds are not given unless a Staff member witnesses the problem.
- Coats/jackets/book bags are to be stored in designated Club areas. Please have your name on all items.
- Please leave all valuables at home. The Club is not responsible for lost or stolen items.
- A Staff member supervises all areas. Any area without a Staff member supervising is considered closed to members.
- The following are not allowed on Club property: tobacco, drugs, alcohol, weapons of any kind, gambling, and gang symbols or colors.

Membership Requirements

A current membership is needed to participate in Club activities. We allow one visit as a guest per child before a membership must be purchased. Completing the membership form thoroughly is critical so we have necessary information related to allergies, emergency contacts, etc.

Bullying

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and involves an imbalance of power and strength. It is important to note that the behavior must be repeated over time in order to be considered as potential “bullying”. Bullying is abuse, not conflict; and this distinction is important when dealing with the guidance and discipline of our members. Under no circumstances will bullying be tolerated at our Clubs.

Damage to Club Property

If a Club member intentionally damages Club property or does so through the negligence of Club rules or policies, the parents/guardians may be asked to pay for the damaged property. Loss of Club privileges for the member may be enforced until the damaged property is paid for.

Member Conduct and Discipline

If members disregard the rights and responsibilities of Club membership, they will be disciplined accordingly. We utilize time-outs, guidance techniques and program suspension when necessary to ensure all members have the opportunity to enjoy their Club experience. Parents/guardians may be contacted if assistance is needed and will be notified immediately if a member needs to be suspended from a program.

BGCGNWI reserves the right to check bags or ask members to empty pockets if we suspect a danger to our members. This will always be done by a Club, Site or Program Director in the presence of the member in question and at least one other Staff person.

Security Cameras

All Clubs have security cameras installed both inside and outside the facility. Please know that your child(ren) is being monitored by cameras and that footage will be reviewed as necessary.

It is Club policy that we do NOT show video footage to members or parents under any circumstances. Full-time Staff will review all incidents and determine what happened based on what they see. Should the police request a copy of video footage for any reason, it will be given to them without delay.

Access Control

All Clubs have some type of “access control” system installed. During the busiest times when members arrive in groups, it would be appropriate for a Club, Site or Program Director to hold the door open to allow entry. At some Clubs, an intercom system is included with access control. This should be used to verify the identity and intent of the visitor before entry is allowed.

We ask that you NOT hold the door for anyone if you are not certain they are a Club member, Staff or parent/guardian.

Memberships Across Clubs

A membership at one Club within our organization is valid at any Club in either Lake or Porter County. However, if a member starts attending a different Club regularly, their “home Club” will be changed in the member management system. Should any member be suspended from a Club for any reason, that suspension will be enforced at all Clubs.

Telephone Use

A phone is always available for members to call a parent/guardian. Members must get permission before using the phone. Parents may also call the Club to check on or relay important information to their child.

Medicine Policy

We prefer not to be involved in the dispensing of medications. However, we understand certain medications like inhalers and epi-pens must be administered in a timely manner and our involvement improves the safety of our members. When pills must be administered and it isn't possible for a parent/guardian to do so, our Clubs may assist provided certain guidelines are followed. Please ask your Club or Site Director about the possibility of dispensing medication.

Non-Smoking and Drug Free Environment

All facilities, properties, grounds and events are non-smoking and drug free. Alcohol, non-prescription drugs and any other substances are strictly prohibited. Everyone is expected to report any smoking or drug use to Staff immediately.

Impaired Individual

Any parent/guardian appearing to be impaired will not be permitted to leave the building with his or her child. Another authorized parent/guardian will be contacted to pick up the child and the impaired individual from the Club. Failure to cooperate will result in the police being called.

Health and Emergency Procedures

Please do not bring your child to the Club if he/she has signs of illness. If a member becomes ill while at the Club, parents will be notified to pick up their child. In case of an accident or emergency involving a member which requires medical attention, proper medical aid will be sought. The parent/guardian will be notified as soon as possible of any emergency. If expenses for medical services are incurred, it is the member's parent/guardian's responsibility to pay for all medical costs. Please notify the Club of any phone number or address change so emergency contacts can be reached.

Dress Code

Footwear must be worn at all times. Sandals or open-toed shoes are allowed in the Club, but gym shoes must be worn when participating in gym activities.

We tend to follow school guidelines in terms of appropriate attire. Your child may be asked to change clothes or phone home if necessary. Examples of inappropriate clothing include sagging pants; logos associated with alcohol, drugs, gangs, or offensive material; and clothes that are revealing.

Parent / Guardian Access to Members / Custody Issues

Occasionally, parents or guardians enter into custody disputes over their children. If one parent says that the other should not have access to the child, we cannot honor this if the other parent is listed as a parent/guardian in the membership system. If a parent has a restraining order or court order regarding access to a child, he or she must provide us with a copy of it in order for us to act on it. BGCNWI takes the same stance when it comes to granting access to membership, attendance and financial records.

Inclement Weather

Club locations will be closed if the weather is severe enough to cancel or force an early dismissal from school for the day. To find out if your Club will be closed, check the following sources: bgcgreaterwni.org or our Facebook and Twitter profiles. If schools are closed, Clubs are closed. If school dismisses early due to weather, Clubs will NOT be open and buses will NOT bring members to Clubs. Please make alternate plans and discuss your severe weather plan with your child(ren).

Concussion Protocol

The organization has written concussion protocol members are put through anytime there is a head injury, no matter how minor. There are also written guidelines that are shared with parents after the incident so they know what symptoms to look for at home. Please ask at the desk if you'd like a copy of the guidelines.

Supervised Facility

An employee and/or fully-trained volunteer will oversee each of our program areas. No room or group of children is to be left unattended at any time. Either the Club, Site or Program Director will be at the Club during Club hours unless permission is given in advance.

Our Clubs strive to meet targeted Staff to member ratios. These may be as low as 2:1 for tutoring or 10:1 for Field Trips, or as high as 50:1 for Gym or large-group activities. The approved ratio for our Kidstop before and after-school child care settings is 15:1, with a minimum of two Staff members.

Background Checks

Background checks are done on all potential Staff and volunteers prior to hire, as well as annually thereafter. Reference checks are also conducted.

Safety Training

All Staff are trained in safety protocol prior to being allowed to work with children, and annually thereafter. Topics include (but are not limited to):

- Child abuse prevention
- Mandated reporting requirements
- Grooming prevention
- Emergency drills and procedures

First Aid / CPR Training

All Staff working directly with Club members are required to become certified in First Aid and CPR within the first 90 days of employment.

Physical Contact with Members

Employees are expected to make every effort to counsel and calm a disgruntled member. The only time physical force is considered acceptable is to restrain someone from harming him/herself, another person or the physical property of the Boys & Girls Club. If at all possible, physical restraint of a member will be done only by a Staff member trained in Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI).

Allowable physical contact between members and Staff is limited to handshakes, high fives, fist bumps, and quick side hugs.

One-on-One Interaction

One-on-one interaction between youth and Staff without visibility by others is prohibited. This would include counseling, tutoring, and disciplinary issues. It also includes phone calls and written communication like texts or letters, as well as the transport of members in Club vehicles.

All closed-door meetings should take place with at least three people in the room, with the third person being another Staff member, parent or Club member. One-on-one conversations may take place as long as they are done so in a visible area.

Exceptions may only be made when delivering medical or counseling services by a licensed, trained Social Worker or similar professional, or in an unavoidable emergency situation.

Out of Club Contact

It is in the best interest of all concerned that all contact between Staff and members be on a professional basis in the context of Club programming. Therefore, we specifically prohibit the establishment of personal, out-of-Club relationships between Staff and members. This includes written correspondence and social media. Pre-existing relationships (like friends of the family) must be documented and signed by those parties involved.

Reporting Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect

According to Indiana state law, our organization has a legal responsibility to immediately report suspected child abuse or neglect. This would include inappropriate sexual contact between members.

Directors of Social and Emotional Wellness

BGCGNWI employs licensed Social Workers trained to help members deal with a variety of issues. Should a situation be identified where a Social Worker might be able to help, a parent/guardian may be contacted to make this recommendation. Based on the nature of the issue, working with a Social Worker to establish a Safety Plan may be required in order to continue membership. Safety Plans are implemented in an effort to provide support, promote safety and continue membership without disruption. Please inquire at your Club to learn more about social and emotional support for members in need.

Restroom Policy

Where possible, Staff and adult visitors to the Club should not use the same restrooms as those used by Club members. Adults should be directed to a separate restroom when necessary. Should a separate restroom not be available, Staff should “clear” the common restroom of all members before allowing the adult to enter.

It is also Club policy that members not be allowed to take electronic devices into our restrooms, whether personally owned or provided by the Club. Restrooms are checked by Staff periodically for cleanliness and behavioral issues.

Club Capacities

Capacities for each room and each facility are established based on overall square footage and the number of members each room or area can reasonably serve at any given time. Membership or participation in certain activities may be limited to ensure the safety of all concerned.

Driver Safety Procedures

All bus drivers are properly licensed and trained, and annual checks are made of driving records. Guidelines followed by our drivers include (but are not limited to):

- Strict adherence to field trip protocol
- Pre and post-trip inspections of each vehicle
- A minimum of two Staff on each bus or mini bus, including the driver unless approved in advance
- Prohibition of transporting only one member at any time

Each bus is equipped with a bumper sticker directing other drivers to report issues they have with how our vehicles are being driven. Any reported issues are taken seriously and addressed immediately.

Emergency Drills and Reunification

There are three emergency-preparedness drills conducted on a quarterly basis: Evacuation, Severe Weather and Lockdown. Should it be necessary to evacuate the building and it is deemed unsafe to return for an extended period of time, reunification procedures may be implemented. For each Club, a nearby location has been established where members can safely be reunited with parents/guardians.



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